



Aethiopica 15 (2012)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

ALEXANDER MECKELBURG, Universität Hamburg

Review

JOHN MARKAKIS, *The Last Two Frontiers*

Aethiopica 15 (2012), 294–296

ISSN: 2194–4024

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

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erosity and sharing in egalitarian societies (pp. 136ff.). But sometimes he also quarrels on diverging positions with colleagues who worked on neighbours of the Hamär. For example, Strecker would by no means agree on Katsuyoshi Fukui's conviction that the Bodi will go on killing others for ever (p. 171). A prominent concern of the author in the book reviewed here – as in many of his writings before – is to render homage to Aike Berinas, called Baldambe, the key informant and close friend of the author who died in 1995.

“Ethnographic chiasmus”, although it consists of published articles, will be welcomed by the community of anthropologists and éthiopisants as part of an evolving thesaurus which is so far unique for a small ethnic group in southern Ethiopia.

Ulrich Braukämper, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

JOHN MARKAKIS, *Ethiopia. The Last Two Frontiers*, = Eastern Africa Series, Woodbridge et al.: James Currey, 2011, 383 pp. Price: GB-£ 40,-. ISBN: 978-1-84701-033-9.

General history on modern Ethiopia¹ tends to focus on the central Ethiopian highland empire, its institutions, its historical trajectories, its relations to neighbouring people, and finally in post-Adwa Ethiopia, on the relations with the neighbouring colonial powers. Following the *great tradition* in Ethiopian Studies these books treat the periphery of this empire with very little interest to the nation-building project and the relation between centre and periphery rather vaguely in terms of “unification” of the Ethiopian nation state.

Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers is yet another general history of Ethiopia, but John Markakis, author of numerous books and essays on Ethiopia, brings together conclusions of his long research experience (spanning three successive governments) with Ethiopian politics, and makes the periphery of the state his focal point of entry: thus the book offers a timely and comprehensive perspective on the nation state-building process, from ca. 1890 up to today, and approaches the historical changes and continuities of the centre-periphery relations under three successive regimes. The study's focus is on the lowland peripheries “because its part in the story is little known and, even more significantly, because this region poses a critical test for the nation-state building

¹ Cp. BAHRU ZWEDE, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855–1991* = Eastern African Studies, Oxford: James Currey – Athens, OH: Ohio University Press – Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, ²2001; HAROLD GOLDEN MARCUS, *A History of Ethiopia*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, ²2002.

project” (p. 45). Nation-building, according to Markakis, implies the integration of the periphery. Geography, demography, political economy and cultural variations are the differences in the nation state between the different groups inhabiting the lowlands and the highlands, which the study sets into contrast. And these factors are the “variables that influence the process of state formation, because they determine the cost of integration of peripheral regions and the economic returns that can offset it” (p. 23). The *last two frontiers*, are the physical lowland borderlands (the book’s focus is on ‘Afar, Somali, Boorana, Anywaa and Nuer, as well as Berta and Gumuz) as opposed to the rather integrated “highland peripheries”, like the Gurage, Sidaama and Oromo inhabited areas (pp. 36–39). The frontiers process is analyzed in terms of state encroachment aiming at social and political integration. In this, the author takes its theoretical inspiration from contesting the conventional political analysis of the African state from the centre. In this reading, the periphery is not a mere victim of the nation-building but an active player in it. The importance of the periphery in the political history is evident in the contribution it made to regime changes, which represent historical points of ruptures in the state-making process, since these are caused “by the stress of upholding centre hegemony by force, and are followed by significant modifications intended to ease the stress and move the integration process forward [...]. The role of the periphery features prominently both among the causes and the consequences of these ruptures” (p. 11).

Despite the fact, that the book contests the analysis of the nation-building process from a state-centrist perspective (Markakis’ brief overview on the theory, largely depending on Boone (2003)², is found under “The Centre/Periphery Perspective” on pp. 7–11) its analysis begins and ends with the centre. State formation is organized from an expanding centre, through the forceful subjugation of neighbouring territories that are eventually woven into an “administrative network to incorporate and capture their resources” (p. 7). The periphery is defined by its marginal position in the power structures of the state, and its “exclusion from state power” (ibid.). Once defined, the interplay and relations between centre and periphery are the main topics of the book. The analysis elaborates the historic continuities in these relations. Thus, the empirical part of the book begins with the description of the “winning [of] an empire” (pp. 89–107) in the late-19th century and the expansionist politics of the “Abyssinian core” (pp. 32–36) under *ase Mənilək II*. From “Building the State: The Imperial model” (pp. 89–160) to “Rebuilding the state: The

² CATHERINE BOONE, *Political Topographies of the African State: Rural Authority and Institutional Choice* = Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

socialist model” (pp. 161–228) to “Rebuilding the state: The federal model” (pp. 229–255) the book looks at the successive attempts of the centre to structure the periphery culminating in today’s *multinational federalism*. Never before has the skillful management of the periphery played a more important role for the survival of the central government’s ideology and thus, one major part of the book is dedicated to the continuities and changes of the lowland periphery’s experiences within the federal model. While the “Imperial rule in the periphery” (pp. 131–60) and “the socialist state and the periphery” (pp. 202–228) are rather short descriptions, the book offers a lengthy overview of the “federal state and the periphery” (pp. 279–353 [Part V]).

Markakis’ well grounded historical approach highlights the changes of highland rule in lowlands. Even more revealing are the continuities elaborated in this regard. Until today, successive governments have tried to gain political control over the lowlands; the *nāftāñña* of the imperial period, the *zāmāčča* students and *qābālā* administrators of the *Därg* era, have changed to the peripheral elites referred to in the book as *auxiliary elite* and their highland advisors. The existence of elites in the periphery does not mean they belong to the same class as the centre elites. To the author, this dichotomy has not changed in Ethiopia though the “the social composition of the elites” (p. 8) has: “If a genuine elite is not available in the periphery it must be created” (p. 11).

This is one of the many achievements of the book. It critically analyses the current government, its roots in history as well as the strategic functions of federalism, and draws informative conclusion on the democratic paths taken and abandoned: “Hopes for political stability were also disappointed when the democratic experiment turned into a farce. The regime’s unwillingness to share, let alone surrender power had several implications. The most important was the continuity of centre domination over the periphery, federalism notwithstanding. Deriving from that, was the failure to advance towards political integration, an indispensable step in the nation state-building project” (p. 278).

Markakis’ book is the first comprehensive history of Ethiopia of its sort with a clear focus on centre-periphery relations. Written by an author with an intense life and professional experience with and within Ethiopia, who has largely focused much of his career, on the social processes of the periphery of the state, the book is a well grounded, timely and a revealing insight into the historical forces of social and political integration and the alienation of the nation state.

Alexander Meckelburg, Universität Hamburg